

# The Scholastic Audit

**A Report  
on School Improvement  
in Kentucky  
2003**

## Appendix B — Six Common Variance Points

The following six variance points were found to be common to the 2000-2001 and 2002-2003 scholastic audits and reviews.

- 2.1d. Test scores are used to identify curriculum gaps.
- 2.1h. Samples of student work are analyzed to inform instruction, revise curriculum and pedagogy, and obtain information on student progress.
- 3.1b. Instructional strategies and learning activities are aligned with the district, school, and state learning goals and assessment expectations for student learning.
- 4.1f. The school intentionally assigns staff to maximize opportunities for *all* students to have access to the staff's instructional strengths.
- 5.1d. Students are provided with a variety of opportunities to receive additional assistance to support their learning beyond the initial classroom instruction.
- 6.2c. The school/district effectively uses the employee evaluation and the individual professional growth plan to improve proficiency.

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Photos by Rick McComb



- 4.1k. The school/district provides support for the physical, cultural socio-economic, and intellectual needs of all student which reflects a commitment to equity and an appreciation of diversity.
- 5.1a. Families and the community are active partners in the educational process and work together with the school/district staff to promote programs and services for all students.
- 5.1d. Students are provided with a variety of opportunities to receive additional assistance to support their learning beyond the initial classroom instruction.
- 6.1c. Staff development priorities are set in alignment with the goals for student performance and the individual growth plans of staff.
- 6.1f. Professional development planning shows a direct connection to and analysis of student achievement data.
- 6.2c. The school/district effectively uses the employee evaluation and the individual professional growth plan to improve staff proficiency.
- 6.2d. Leadership provides and implements a process of personnel evaluation which meets or exceeds standards set in statute and regulation.
- 7.1k. There is evidence that the principal demonstrates leadership skills in the areas of academic performance, learning environment and efficiency.
- 8.1a. There is evidence that the school is organized to maximize use of all available resources to support high student and staff performance.
- 8.1c. The instructional and non-instructional staff are allocated and organized based on the learning needs of all students.
- 8.1d. There is evidence that the staff makes efficient use of instructional time to maximize student learning.
- 8.1f. The schedule is intentionally aligned with the school's mission and designed to ensure that all staff provide quality instructional time (e.g., flex time, organization based on the developmental needs of students, interdisciplinary units, etc.).
- 9.4b. The school/district goals for building and strengthening the capacity of the school/district instructional and organizational effectiveness are defined.

## Message from the Commissioner



In Kentucky, we know that all children can learn at high levels, given adequate time, opportunity and support. We know it because we see it happening in many Kentucky schools. So we must take lessons from schools that are succeeding and use that information to help schools that are struggling. The Scholastic Audit process enables us to do that with new confidence and precision.

We are already learning lessons about what is being done differently in successful and struggling schools. These lessons reveal specific leverage points that can focus the work of schools in a productive direction. This document explains these preliminary findings from this second round of scholastic audits and reviews.

I hope you will take time to reflect on the ideas presented here. A collaborative effort that capitalizes on what we are learning will help all schools reach proficiency by 2014.

Gene Wilhoit  
Commissioner of Education



## Appendix A — 27 Variance Points

Listed below are the twenty seven indicators that were found to be variance points based on the data obtained from the 2002-2003 scholastic audits and reviews.

- 1.1g. The curriculum provides access to a common academic core for all students.
- 2.1d. Test scores are used to identify curriculum gaps.
- 2.1h. Samples of student work are analyzed to inform instruction, revise curriculum and pedagogy, and obtain information on student progress.
- 3.1b. Instructional strategies and learning activities are aligned with the district school, and state learning goals and assessment expectations for student learning.
- 3.1d. Teachers demonstrate the content knowledge necessary to challenge and motivate students to high levels of learning.
- 4.1a. There is leadership support for a safe, orderly, and equitable learning environment (e.g., culture audits/school opinion surveys).
- 4.1b. Leadership creates experiences that foster the belief that all children can learn at high levels in order to motivate staff to produce continuous improvement in student learning.
- 4.1c. Teachers hold high expectations for all students academically and behaviorally; this is evidenced in their practices.
- 4.1d. Teachers and non-teaching staff are involved in both formal and informal decision-making processes regarding teaching and learning.
- 4.1e. Teachers recognize and accept their professional role in student success and failure.
- 4.1f. The school intentionally assigns staff to maximize opportunities for *all* students to have access to the staff's instructional strengths.
- 4.1h. There is evidence that the teachers and staff care about students and inspire their best efforts.
- 4.1i. Multiple communication strategies and contexts are used for the dissemination of information to all stakeholders.
- 4.1j. There is evidence that student achievement is highly valued and publicly celebrated (e.g., displays of student work, assemblies).

Some of the pertinent questions that need collaborative discussions and responses may include:

- What is the path that the Kentucky Department of Education and its partners need to take in order to support continuous school improvement progress and student proficiency by 2014 and beyond?
- What is the significance of the six common variance points that remain constant over the two biennia?
- How can we most effectively use our collective resources to support school and district improvement?
- How do we continue to develop, grow and support leaders at all levels in order to improve and sustain high levels of student learning?
- How do we develop school and district cultures that encourage, nurture and value shared leadership responsibilities?
- How do we strategically develop and implement leadership programs for aspiring school leaders to ensure we have a pipeline of leaders ready to take on the task of leading school improvement across the commonwealth?
- How do we ensure high quality professional development for leaders at all levels from the classroom to the boardroom?
- What do we need to do to enable schools and districts to focus more on what matters and less on what works?
- What are the multiple ways we can communicate that implementing change in a school depends more on the culture of the school and district than the grade level or community setting?
- What must we learn to do to determine the readiness of a faculty for changing its current practices?
- What must we do to ensure every one understands the strength gained from vision, mission, values and beliefs to a school community?
- In what ways can we communicate that a school’s population may be an explanation, but not an excuse, for low student performance and schools can and do succeed against these odds?
- Do schools and districts really understand that context has a direct bearing on school performance?

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develop the capacity to provide leadership as it relates to the school improvement process.

District and school leaders must provide the structures to maximize opportunities for all students to have access to all of the curriculum and opportunities for students to receive additional support for learning. There has to be leadership support for an equitable learning environment. This means that families and communities must be engaged as active partners in the educational process and work together with schools and districts to remove barriers to learning.

### Implications for District Support and Accountability

In Kentucky, a local school district must provide appropriate instructional leadership and instructional support.

Research conducted by the Learning First Alliance and shared in *Beyond Islands of Excellence: What districts Can Do to Improve Instruction and Achievement in All Schools* supports this assertion. It indicates that districts are improving teaching and learning by having the following common components:

- a vision focused on student learning and instructional improvement.
- systemwide curricula that connect to state standards, are coherent across grade levels, and provide teachers with clear expectations about what to teach.
- a multimeasure accountability system and systemwide use of data to inform practice, to hold schools accountable for results, and to monitor progress.
- a new approach to professional development – one that includes a coherent and district-organized set of strategies to improve instruction.
- instructional leadership distributed across stakeholders.
- strategic allocation of financial and human resources.
- use of high-quality research to inform decisionmaking and practice.

As a means to help districts fulfill their responsibility for improving teaching and learning and pursuant to 703 KAR 5: 130, the Kentucky Department of Education is piloting a district version of the scholastic audit in the summer of 2003.

### Conclusion

This *Report of School Improvement in Kentucky* is an attempt to illuminate the issues Kentucky's schools face in implementing and sustaining school improvement initiatives over time that positively impact student learning results. It also serves as a "progress marker" as we look at Kentucky's schools after each accountability cycle.

As in the structure of our scholastic audit and review reports, we end this report with thought provoking questions rather than attempting to offer one-size fits all solutions.



Whole School Implications for Learners, Teachers and Leaders

Each school and corresponding district in Kentucky has a role in improving teaching and learning. Our nation has a moral imperative to close the existing achievement gap between low income students and their more advantaged peers. The No Child Left Behind Act makes this a legal requirement as well. Yet improving learning opportunities for all students will require more than individual talents or school-by-school efforts. It will demand system wide approaches that touch every child in every school in every district across the state and nation.

In Kentucky we are learning from our scholastic audit/review data that we must improve instruction and commit the political will and resources necessary to develop district wide solutions. Without efforts to create success across school systems, far too many students will continue to languish. This is unacceptable. District level administrators need to provide guidance and support to schools about policy and practices that will improve instruction if whole school improvement is to be achieved and sustained over extended time. The key is finding and fostering a balance between district-level support and school-level autonomy and flexibility to innovate. Because context is so different and so critical, challenges vary from school to school and leaders need flexibility to address the specific challenges specific to their environments. When districts support schools and plan carefully and collaboratively, they can translate their visions for student achievement into improvement.

Master schedules of schools must be developed to intentionally provide collaborative time for teachers to examine student work to inform their instruction. Each school and corresponding district must take steps to address vertical curricular transitions both within the school and between the pre-secondary schools and high schools. All students must have access to the entire curriculum. Teacher schedules must be configured to ensure that students have opportunities to learn from the most effective teachers. Students must understand what they are expected to know and be able to do and what proficient work looks like. So must all adults.

Teachers, administrators, and school staff must be equipped with research-based and varied teaching strategies. Teaching strategies must be focused on *increasing student achievement* through active engagement and should be designed to reflect differentiated instruction, diverse learning styles, multiple intelligences, culturally responsiveness and brain research. Instructional time must be protected, both by policy and practice, from interruptions and distractions. SBDM council policies must be developed to adequately address and provide structures for aligning instructional strategies to meet the needs of a diverse and changing student population. These policies should be used for monitoring and modifying instruction to meet student needs and support proficient work.

School districts and school leaders will need to be equipped to gather, analyze and use data in the development and implementation of plans to improve instruction and student achievement. The resources of the Kentucky Department of Education as well as our professional alliances (e.g., Kentucky Association of School Administrators, Kentucky School Board Association, Kentucky Association of School Councils, etc.) and others will need to provide professional development in support of this effort. SBDM councils must

Preface

The centerpiece of Kentucky’s system of public education is its vision of what students should know and be able to do as a result of their school experience. Every aspect of our system is designed to promote high levels of student achievement and to measure schools’ progress in getting to proficiency.

The primary purpose for all our work will always be our students and the educational opportunities they experience each and every day in the classrooms of our schools. Kentucky’s future relies on the commitment to providing high quality teaching and the finest learning opportunities for each and every child. The purpose of the scholastic audit process is to support this commitment by ensuring high expectations are held for all students, ensuring a safe and supportive place for all students, and engaging parents and other community members in helping students achieve high academic expectations.

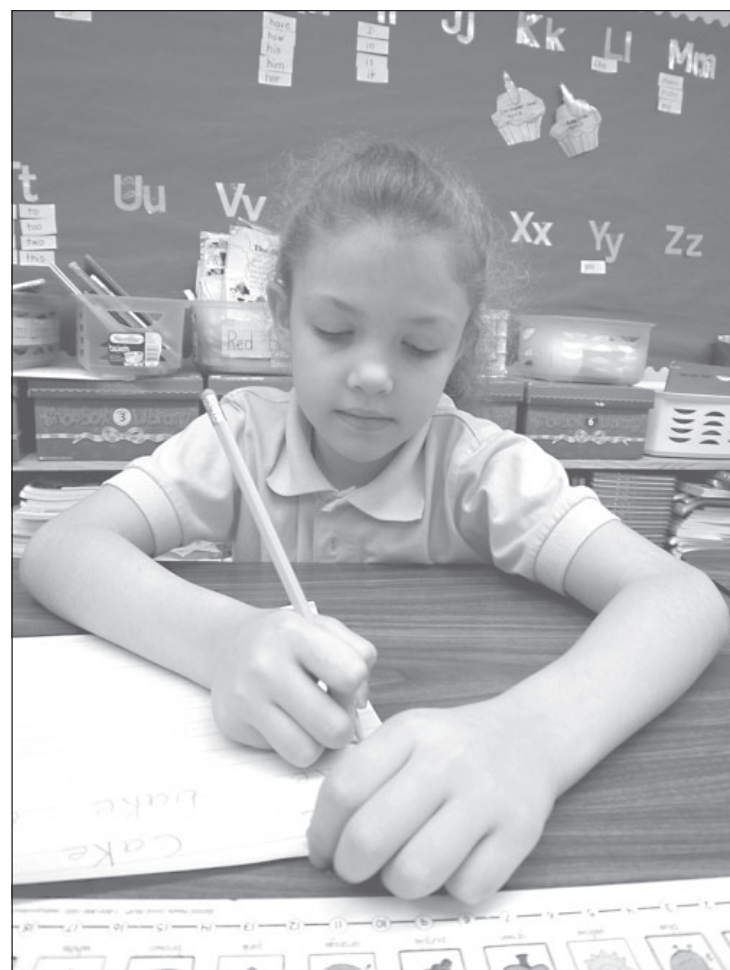
Introduction

This report is the result of scholastic audits or reviews conducted during the 2000-2001 and the 2002-2003 academic school years. The scholastic audit or review is designed to examine a school’s learning environment, efficiency, and academic performance of students. It is about opportunities for transforming our schools into places where the knowledge that all children can learn at high levels permeates the culture and drives all efforts. The audits and reviews of 272 schools provide a look at the good things that schools have been doing to overcome obstacles and the challenges that schools face in getting to proficiency. This report is based on these audits and reviews. While the work is reflective of only two rounds of audits/reviews, the information provides an opportunity to delineate some of the struggles faced by low performing schools and a perspective of factors that distinguish a school that has met its accountability academic index (successful) from an assistance school.

While this report does not represent a rigorous evaluation of all schools in Kentucky, the results can be used as a lens to focus efforts of schools, districts, the Kentucky Department of Education and other stakeholders as they work to have all schools at proficiency by 2014.

To enhance the reader’s understanding of this report, it is important to clarify some of the terms used. To this end, the following list of definitions is offered.

- Successful School – A school that achieved an accountability index score on the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) at, or above, its goal for the biennium.
- Level 3 Assistance School – A school whose accountability index score on the CATS places it in the lowest one-third of schools below their assistance line.
- Leverage Point – An indicator where results vary greatly from successful schools to Level 3 assistance schools as determined by the results of the 2000-2001 round of scholastic audits/reviews. Seventeen (17) indicators were designated as leverage points.



Variance Point – After the audits/reviews were completed in 2002-2003, the term “leverage point” was changed to “variance point” to more accurately describe the meaning of the term. Twenty-seven (27) indicators were found to be variance points as a result of the latest round of audits/reviews. Six (6) common variance points exist when comparing the results of the two rounds of audits/reviews. These common variance points are identified in the appendix of this report.

### Background/History

In 1998, the General Assembly passed KRS 158.6455. The intent of this legislation was to ensure that schools succeed with all students and receive the appropriate consequences in proportion to that success. Section three (3) of the statute charged the Kentucky Board of Education to adopt administrative regulations to establish consequences for schools

whose assessment index fell below their assistance line. In the long term accountability system, these consequences are designed to improve teaching and learning and may include a scholastic audit, eligibility for Commonwealth School Improvement Funds, school improvement plans, assistance from a Highly Skilled Educator, evaluation of school personnel and student transfer to successful schools.

Section four (4) of the statute directs the Kentucky Board of Education to establish guidelines for conducting scholastic audits, which includes a process for appointing and training team members, reviewing a school’s learning environment, efficiency, and academic performance of students; evaluating each certified staff member assigned to the school (only certified members of the audit team shall evaluate personnel); and reporting to the Kentucky Board of Education about the appropriateness of a school’s classification and the assistance required to improve teaching and learning in the audited school.

Regulations adopted by the Kentucky Board of Education charged scholastic audit and review teams to make recommendations on strategies to improve teaching and learning for incorporation into the schools’ improvement plan; the roles and responsibilities of the SBDM council in the critical instructional areas; the effectiveness of the principal as the

working with students. The professional development planned and provided is aligned with comprehensive school improvement goals as well to the individual growth plans of certified staff.

7. Successful schools are generally further along in the implementation of the culture, community support, professional development, leadership, school organization and resource allocation standards (4-8) than they are in the standards of curriculum, assessment, instruction as well as Comprehensive School Improvement Planning (Standards 1,2,3 and 9). Leadership of the successful schools encourages discussions among all stakeholders regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the instructional setting and organizational structure. Significant work remains in both successful and assistance schools in the areas of curriculum, assessment, instruction as well as an effective planning process for school improvement.

**To summarize “Lessons Learned”, three words can be used to distinguish successful schools – those that have met their accountability academic index – from the state’s lowest performing schools. The three distinctive words are as follows:**

### EXPECTATIONS

- **High** - All adults have a firm belief that all learners can learn at high levels.
- **Positive** – All adults, especially the leadership, are cheerleaders of learning for all, operate within “learning communities” and model a “can do” attitude toward high student achievement.

### RESPONSIBILITY

- Clear expectations are communicated to all stakeholders. Everyone knows who is responsible for the “what” and “when”. Timelines, roles, and responsibilities are clearly understood and assigned. Everyone shares in, and is accountable for, learning results.

### FEEDBACK

- **Informational** – Data are shared, analyzed, discussed and used to drive the elements of school improvement toward higher student learning and results.
- **Motivational** – Positive reinforcement and genuine praise are given frequently to both students and adults as they engage in improvement efforts.
- **Performance** – Regular and rich conversations/dialogues occur, both formally and informally, from classroom walkthroughs and the resulting individual growth plans of certified staff. The administration of the school and district use these tools to develop, monitor and coach the performance of students and adults.



3. Successful schools use multiple evaluation and assessment strategies to frequently and continuously monitor and modify instruction to meet student needs and support proficient work. They assess often and have aggressive intervention strategies for students who need extra help and support. These schools use test scores from multiple sources to identify curricular and instructional gaps. Samples of student work are analyzed to inform instruction, revise curriculum and teaching and to obtain information about student progress.
4. In successful schools there is *relentless* focus on student learning. The instructional program in these schools actively engages all students by using effective, varied, and research-based practices to improve student performance. It is not uncommon to observe teachers using a variety of approaches and strategies to engage all learners.
5. It appears that the more successful schools become, the more likely staffs are to analyze test data and other student work. The information gained from this activity is used when making needed changes to bring about continuous school improvement. Comprehensive school improvement planning is a collaborative process involving many stakeholders and student achievement data is used to drive the planning process.
6. Schools that are successful tend to see professional development as an ongoing process rather than a series of unrelated events. Staff development needs are identified through the analysis of student and teacher work for the expressed purpose of improving student achievement. Professional development in successful schools is focused on improving and, if necessary, changing instructional practice. These schools have been creative in carving out time for job-embedded professional development during the course of the school day in the midst of



instructional leader in the three areas of the audit; certified staff needing further evaluation; assistance and resources needed to revise the school's comprehensive school improvement plan and priorities and strategies which the school or district may adopt to support the improvement effort. The *Standards and Indicators for School Improvement: Kentucky's Model for Whole School Improvement* document is the set of common standards upon which the recommendations for assistance are to be based.

## Methodology

All schools with an accountability academic index score that placed them below the assistance line were divided into three categories. Schools with scores that placed them in the lowest one-third were classified as Level 3 and received a scholastic audit. Scholastic audit teams were comprised of a parent, teacher, school administrator, district administrator, university faculty member and a Highly Skilled Educator. Schools with scores that placed them in the middle third were classified as Level 2 and received a scholastic review. Scholastic review teams were comprised of two representatives from the regional service center and two to four representatives from the school's district. Schools with assessment scores that placed them in the upper third were classified as Level 1 and most conducted a self-review using *The Standards and Indicators for School Improvement: Kentucky's Model for Whole School Improvement*. In addition to schools judged to be in need of assistance, reviews were also conducted in a sample of successful schools. Successful schools were defined as having an accountability academic index that met or exceeded their goal.

The Kentucky Department of Education has conducted scholastic audits or reviews in 131 schools during the 2000 - 2001 school year. These were 83 elementary schools, 28 middle schools and 20 high schools. By index scores, they included 47 Level 3 schools, 50 Level 2 schools, 15 Level 1 schools and 18 successful schools. During the 2002-2003 school year the Kentucky Department of Education conducted 141 scholastic audits or reviews. Of these, 29 were classified as Level 3 schools, 32 as Level 2, 29 as Level 1 and 24 as successful. The results from the sample of "successful schools" (n = 42) should be interpreted with caution. As more successful schools are audited, we will be able to gather information that will continue to clarify what separates them from other schools.

Audit and review teams were trained by the Kentucky Department of Education. Kentucky's *Standards and Indicators for School Improvement* document was the primary assessment and evaluation instrument. Teams also compiled results from surveys on leadership and school culture. The findings from these surveys were considered in the development of the reports, along with examination of documents provided in the school portfolio, team experiences, interviews and observations. The school portfolio included a variety of materials and documents pertinent to the school, including the school's Comprehensive School Improvement Plan, state assessment results, student achievement data, non-academic data, writing portfolio analysis data, school survey data, district technology inventory, school handbook and master schedule, school report card, School-Based Decision Making council policies and meeting minutes, teacher unit/lesson plans, district evaluation plan, curriculum documents, examples of student work and listings of school professional development activities. The school profile is the school's analysis of its portfolio, naming strengths, limitations, opportunities, and threats it is facing.

Scholastic audit and review activities include a review of documents collected for the school portfolio and profile, classroom observations, and formal interviews and informal discussions with teachers, students, parents, the principal, assistant principals, counselors and (where appropriate) central office staff. The audit or review teams evaluated the evidence contained above in comparison to the Performance Descriptors for Kentucky's *Standards and Indicators for School Improvement* for each indicator, under each standard, then agreed upon a finding and assigned a score for each indicator on the following scale:

Category 1 – Little or no development or implementation

Category 2 – Limited development and partial implementation

Category 3 – Fully functioning and operational level of development and implementation

Category 4 – Exemplary level of development and implementation

Scholastic audit and review teams offered recommendations and next steps to improve performance in each standard. Commendations were also offered when the indicators of a particular standard were evaluated as being exemplary. The specific findings of the reports were organized into nine standards under the headings of **Academic Performance** (Standards 1,2, & 3), **Learning Environment** (Standards 4,5, & 6), and **Efficiency** (Standards 7, 8, & 9). The nine standards with their supporting indicators must be considered together as an integrated whole. It is the cumulative effect of all the standards that yields whole school improvement and high student academic achievement.

**Data and Findings by Standard**

A description of the findings for each standard follows. Numbers and letters in parentheses refer to the particular indicator within the standard the finding is explaining. This reference is provided where possible. The findings are based on the most recent round of audits or reviews conducted during the 2002-2003 school year.

**Academic Performance Standard 1 – Curriculum.**

**The school develops and implements a curriculum that is rigorous, intentional, and aligned to state and local standards.**

The percentage of indicators for each category in Standard 1 as determined by 2000 and 2002 audits/reviews of Level 3 assistance schools and schools that met their academic index goal are provided below.

	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Category 4
Schools that met their goal 2000:	19	60	22	0
Schools that met their goal 2002:	6	54	34	6
Level 3 assistance schools 2000:	46	43	12	0
Level 3 assistance schools 2002:	33	58	9	0

- Evaluations and growth plans are effectively used to guide selection of appropriate professional development and improve skills.
- Staff are assigned instructional schedules that maximize their strengths.
- Staff identifies the learning needs of all students through an analysis of student work and test results.
- Classroom assessment matters as much as CATS results and is used to modify pedagogy.
- Transition points receive special attention (articulation and accountability).
- All students have access to the total curriculum.

**Lessons Learned**

Close examinations of schools that experienced scholastic audits or reviews yield information that can be useful in an effort to improve schools for all Kentucky children. Generally, the most recent audit and review results show that all schools are progressing; however, the gap in progress between successful schools and assistance schools is widening. Seven key lessons emerge when examining what may separate higher-performing schools from others who are not showing the same amount of progress.

1. In successful schools there is evidence that adults believe in the capacity of children to learn at high levels. They believe that all children can achieve and they do whatever it takes to make that happen. These schools have created a culture of achievement and have put into place support structures to ensure that all children have opportunities and support to achieve at high levels. There is a “no excuses” attitude among administrators, teachers and staff in these schools. Student success is at the center of all their efforts. These efforts are driven more by “what matters” than by “what works”. Successful schools keep “the main thing, the main thing”.
2. Schools that are more successful have their curriculum more closely aligned with state standards and the staff has the knowledge and skill in the use of the standards. These schools focus on high academic standards for all students. The faculty, staff and students know what proficient work looks like and students know what they are expected to learn. These schools use state standards to design curriculum and instruction and to assess student work. Teachers in these schools base instruction on the state’s Program of Studies and Core Content for Assessment. These schools communicate across and within grade levels with an intentional focus on key curriculum transition points within grade configurations (e.g., from primary to middle and from middle to high) on a more regular basis. Essentially they have a clearer focus and sense of purpose around instruction, curriculum and assessment. They have been creative in finding time for teachers and staff to meet regularly and examine student work. Collaboration is focused on instructional improvement and includes time for teachers to plan and learn from each other. The focus is on the learner and learning.



The twenty seven (27) variance points, as determined by the most recent audit/review findings (these are listed on page 29 in the Appendix A), represent a possible framework for whole school improvement when matched with a school's profile. When this occurs, schools have a logical place to focus their initial school improvement efforts. As more scholastic audits and reviews are conducted in successful schools and assistance schools, we will have more data to inform our decision-making. A possible strategy sequence for school improvement designed around these areas might look like this:

- All student data is disaggregated.
- Staff assesses gaps – both learning and instructional.
- Staff develops a school improvement plan, complete with specific student performance indicators, that is implemented, consistently monitored, and evaluated for effectiveness.
- Discretionary funds are allocated based on data-identified needs.
- School leaders are afforded opportunities to enhance their competencies and skills.
- Leadership provides high quality evaluation and follow-up support to all staff to enhance student learning and achievement.
- Professional development is ongoing and job-embedded, involves the analysis of student work, and is tied to school-wide improvement goals.



Guiding Question – At what level did schools develop and implement a curriculum that is rigorous, intentional and aligned to state standards?

Implementation of curriculum that is intentional and aligned to state standards and that is expressed across all school levels, both vertically (primary through twelfth grade) and horizontally (throughout the grade level), is essential to ensuring that all students have an opportunity to participate in a challenging curriculum. Scholastic audit results in all schools levels (elementary, middle and high) indicate that schools have made improvements in completely aligning their curriculum with the Core Content for Assessment, Academic Expectations and Program of Studies, but improvement efforts need to continue (1.1a). Findings revealed that in the majority of audited/ reviewed schools, neither the curriculum nor classroom assessments are aligned with state standards (1.1a). There continues to be little or no evidence of an intentional focus on key student transition points (5th-6th and 8th-9th) in all of these schools (1.1d). The majority of these schools (93%) have few or no policies and structures in place to monitor, evaluate and review curriculum (1.1f). Successful schools provide opportunities for teachers of different grade levels to discuss curriculum focus, content, and student achievement (1.1b). They focus on key curriculum transition points within school grade configurations and discuss curriculum with teachers in sending and receiving schools. The higher performing schools have a curriculum aligned with state standards (1.1a), the staff knows and applies the standards, and all students have access to a common core curriculum (1.1g).



**Academic Performance Standard 2 – Classroom Evaluation/ Assessment.**

*The school uses multiple evaluation and assessment strategies to continuously monitor and modify instruction to meet student needs and support proficient student work.*



The percentage of indicators for each category in Standard 2 as determined by 2000 and 2002 audits/reviews of Level 3 assistance schools and schools that met their academic index goal are provided below.

	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Category 4
Schools that met their goal 2000:	20	65	15	0
Schools that met their goal 2002:	7	56	34	3
Level 3 assistance schools 2000:	44	49	6	0
Level 3 assistance schools 2002:	49	47	3	0



Guiding Question – At what level did schools use multiple evaluation and assessment strategies to continuously monitor and modify instruction to meet student needs and support proficient work?

The development and use of rigorous, frequent, multiple and authentic (measures how skills are used in a real situation) assessments that are aligned with state standards is vital to providing quality instruction to meet student needs and support proficient work. Scholastic audits/reviews reveal that while some schools and teachers are developing and implementing multiple strategies to evaluate student learning, the assessments are rarely authentic (2.1a). In all of the schools audited, assessments are rarely rigorous or aligned with the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS), the Core Content for Assessment, Academic Expectations and the Program of Studies (2.1a). In 100% of the audited/reviewed schools, there is little or no evidence of teachers collaborating in the design and use of authentic assessment tasks aligned with core content subject matter (2.1b). In the vast majority of these schools, both the curriculum and the assessments are aligned with textbooks. In 100% of these schools, there is little or no evidence of multiple assessments specifically designed to provide feedback on student

comprehensive school improvement plan that communicates a clear purpose, direction and action plan focused on teaching and learning?

Comprehensive and effective planning is the glue that ties all of the other standards together. It is disappointing to note that, despite the fact that schools have been involved in comprehensive planning for five years, the process in most audited/reviewed schools appears to be a paperwork exercise to meet requirements rather than a meaningful, collaborative effort to guide the actions of the school. While there appear to be some variance points where successful schools differ from audited/reviewed schools, there are several indicators where none of the participating schools scored above a two (2) rating.

Planning in successful schools is almost five times more likely to involve the collection and analysis of information needed to make instructional decisions (9.2a). These schools are at least twelve times more likely to evaluate the success of their plan relative to their stated goals and objectives (9.6b). They are much more likely to use the results of their planning to assess impact on classroom practice and student performance (9.6c). However, overall there was very little or limited development or implementation of a means to do this kind of evaluation in participating schools at any level. It is not surprising that so little of this evaluation occurs since, in only 7% of Level 3 assistance schools and less than 50% of successful schools, planners use research (9.3a), analyze students’ unique learning needs (9.3b) or define desired results for student learning (9.3c) as they develop the plan. Therefore, it is difficult to determine exactly what they are evaluating. There was also little evidence that SBDM councils participate in planning and evaluation as it relates to school improvement (9.6d).

Finally, there is some question of the ongoing impact of the planning process on school learning culture in the participating schools. Over 75% of all schools show little evidence of a collaborative process in the development of the vision, beliefs, mission and goals (9.1a), fewer than 40% evaluate the degree to which the plan achieves the expected impact on classroom practice (9.6b) and 76% show little or no evidence of attempts to sustain a commitment to continuous improvement (9.6d). This could indicate that, in these schools, planning is an activity done by a committee with little ongoing participation by stakeholders, does not result in careful review and adjustment of instructional practice in the classroom and has not become an ongoing tool to drive the schools’ activities in the future. Successful schools have shown improvement in these areas, but more attention needs to be directed toward the planning process in all schools.

*“Failure to plan is planning to fail.”* Hyrum W. Smith

**A Framework for Continuous School Improvement**

*The Standards and Indicators for School Improvement* are not new ideas. They represent new connections among things long known. It is the cumulative effect of all nine standards and their indicators collectively, in a system, that brings about continuous, whole school improvement. Results come from seizing opportunities. Appropriate resources must go to identified needs. Past decisions, policies and strategies need to be revisited, challenged and justified in terms of new challenges and continuous improvement. Focusing resources to address high leverage opportunities will help lead to improving teaching and learning.

Guiding Question – At what level was the school organized to maximize use of all available resources to support high student and staff performance?

A school organized around the structures and activities necessary to maximize teaching and learning bears the mark of strong leadership. Generally, Level 3 schools continue to be organized more for the comfort and expediency of adults rather than on the requirements for proficient student achievement. The audited/reviewed schools are not organized to ensure the optimal use of resources to support high student and staff performance (100%)(8.1a) and to provide access to the entire curriculum by all students (82%)(8.1b). Less than 10% of these schools allocate and organize the use of staff based on the learning needs of all students (8.1c). Instructional time is generally not efficiently used to maximize student learning (8.1d), and team planning time is not focused on the goals and objectives of the improvement plan nor configured to allow cross grade or content area planning (8.1e). The school’s master schedule is frequently not aligned with the school mission nor designed to ensure that all staff provide quality instructional time to all students (8.1f).

Substantial differences exist between successful schools and audited/reviewed schools in the degree to which they analyze and use data to plan the use of school resources (8.2b). Successful schools are almost five times more likely to develop plans for allocation of resources around the analysis of appropriate data, and then to monitor requests for resources to be sure that they address the needs identified in the plan. Interestingly, only 10% of Level 3 assistance schools and 42% of successful schools are rated as fully functioning in allocating and integrating state and federal program resources to address student needs (8.2d). Since this is a major focus and a driving force of the comprehensive planning process, it could be viewed as a high leverage activity.

**Efficiency Standard 9 – Comprehensive and Effective Planning.**

*The school/district develops, implements, and evaluates a comprehensive school improvement plan that communicates a clear purpose, direction, and action plan focused on teaching and learning.*

The percentage of indicators for each category in Standard 9 as determined by 2000 and 2002 audits/reviews of Level 3 assistance schools and schools that met their academic index goal are provided below.

	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Category 4
Schools that met their goal 2000:	15	64	21	0
Schools that met their goal 2002:	7	53	35	5
Level 3 assistance schools 2000:	34	53	12	0
Level 3 assistance schools 2002:	43	52	6	0

Guiding Question – At what level did schools/districts develop, implement and evaluate a

learning for either the teacher to modify instructional practices (2.1e) or for the student to self-assess their knowledge (2.1c).

Audit results also indicate that in 97% of the schools, students are not afforded multiple opportunities to see examples of proficient work and generally do not understand performance standards (2.1f). There is little evidence of students being able to communicate the academic expectations in each class and know what is required to be proficient (2.1c). Students are provided limited opportunities to complete tasks similar to those used on the state assessment (2.1e). Successful schools use classroom assessments, student work and CATS scores to identify instructional gaps (2.1d). Performance standards are communicated to students and are observable in classes (2.1f). Student work is analyzed to modify instruction (2.1h). High performing schools frequently monitor student progress (2.1d) and have structures in place to provide the extra help and support that is needed.

**Academic Performance Standard 3 – Instruction.**

*The school’s instructional program actively engages all students by using effective, varied, and research-based practices to improve student academic performance.*

The percentage of indicators for each category in Standard 3 as determined by 2000 and 2002 audits/reviews of Level 3 assistance schools and schools that met their academic index goal are provided below.

	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Category 4
Schools that met their goal 2000:	19	65	15	1
Schools that met their goal 2002:	6	52	38	4
Level 3 assistance schools 2000:	39	55	6	0
Level 3 assistance schools 2002:	45	51	3	0

Guiding Question – At what level did the school’s instructional program actively engage all students by using effective, varied, and research-based practices to improve student academic performance?

Effective and varied instruction has the power to engage and improve academic performance for all students. Scholastic audit/review results for schools in the assistance category continue to indicate that the most glaring oversight in these schools across all levels is in the area of instruction. There is little or no evidence of effective and varied instructional strategies being used where various learning approaches and learning styles are addressed. A few teachers are exploring and implementing student-centered and research-based instructional strategies, but there is a lack of varied instructional



strategies to meet the different learning needs of students in most classrooms (3.1a). Some teachers have seized the opportunity to improve their instructional practices; however, many teachers in the audited/reviewed schools continue to rely on teacher-directed, lecture formats with little opportunity for hands-on, student-centered instruction (3.1d). Consequently, the learning needs of all students are rarely met.

Diverse populations and different learning styles are largely underserved in audited schools. In all level 3 assistance schools, instructional strategies are not being consistently monitored and aligned with the needs of a diverse student population to ensure that various learning approaches and learning styles are addressed. Moreover, few school policies and activities are in place to consistently monitor and align instruction with the changing needs of a diverse student population, and instruction is rarely modified to meet the needs of all students (3.1c). Few opportunities exist for teachers to analyze student work and to use the results to inform and improve instructional practices (3.1g). Findings indicate that in successful schools instructional strategies and learning activities are aligned with district, school and state learning goals and assessment expectations for student learning (3.1b). In these schools, there is evidence of a *relentless* focus on instruction with structures in place to monitor and modify instruction based on student work (3.1g). Instructional resources were effectively allocated and utilized in 71% of the successful schools while only 14% of the level 3 assistance schools were found to effectively use available instructional resources (3.1f). The integration of technology into instruction was evidenced to a limited degree in both successful schools (17%) and assistance schools (3%) (3.1e).

**Commissioner Gene Wilhoit’s Reflections:** *“Successful schools have aligned their instructional strategies and activities with their goals. Teachers know content and sufficient resources are available for teaching and learning. Instruction is varied, individualized and linked to learning goals. Homework is frequent, monitored and tied to instructional practice. Schools that failed to reach their academic achievement goals usually rank low in these areas.”*



of effective leadership is in providing support and direction for a safe and orderly environment for the school (7.1h). Over two thirds of the audited/reviewed schools are rated fully functioning in this area.

Leaders of successful schools are more likely to focus on developing instructional skills in administrators (7.1c), use data effectively (7.1d), and ensure that all instructional staff members have access to and use curricular materials and resources and participate in the training necessary to use them (7.1e). Over one-half of these schools are rated as fully functioning (a score of 3) in these areas, while a small percentage of them rated as low functioning (a score of 1). By contrast, approximately 75% of the schools in assistance show little or only partial development or implementation in these indicators (a score of 1 or 2).

100% of the audited/reviewed schools have SBDM councils which show no or only partial development or implementation of policy based on student needs (7.1i) and show little or no evidence of an intentional council focus on student achievement (7.1j). Successful schools also perform poorly in these areas, with fewer than 30% of the SBDM councils rated as fully functioning (a score of 3).

One conclusion that could be drawn from these findings is that schools at all levels of achievement continue to struggle to realize the collaborative model of leadership envisioned under the SBDM council statute.

The principals in successful schools are seen as an instructional leader in 76% of the reviews while only 10% of the principals in Level 3 schools are viewed as effective instructional leaders (7.1k).

The issue of leadership continues to be one that distinguishes high achieving schools from low performing schools.

*“Great school leaders create nurturing school environments in which accomplished teaching can flourish and grow.”* Linda Darling-Hammond, Educational Leadership, ASCD, May 2003

**Efficiency Standard 8 – Organizational Structure and Resources.**

***There is evidence that the school is organized to maximize use of all available resources to support high student and staff performance.***

The percentage of indicators for each category in Standard 8 as determined by 2000 and 2002 audits/reviews of Level 3 assistance schools and schools that met their academic index goal are provided below.

	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Category 4
Schools that met their goal 2000:	10	51	36	2
Schools that met their goal 2002:	3	4	64	65
Level 3 assistance schools 2000:	36	46	18	0
Level 3 assistance schools 2002:	40	50	10	0



as likely to have intentional plans for on-going professional development that is aligned with goals for student performance and to have individual growth plans based on the analysis of student achievement data (6.1c).

Evaluation programs in the successful schools are four times more likely to be used to help teachers change behavior and instructional practices (6.2f). Approximately one third of the successful schools also identify and address the instructional leadership needs necessary to achieve their goals for student performance (6.2e).

These findings indicate that successful schools are more intentional in their work in teacher and leadership proficiency. They are more likely to identify what they need to achieve their goals, to provide staff training in those areas and to evaluate results to verify improvement and to provide additional support and direction (6.1d). They use school resources more efficiently and effectively to support and enable staff to achieve their instructional goal (6.2b).

**Efficiency Standard 7 – Leadership.**

*School/district instructional decisions focus on support for teaching and learning, organizational direction, high performance expectations, creating a learning culture and developing leadership capacity.*

The percentage of indicators for each category in Standard 7 as determined by 2000 and 2002 audits/reviews of Level 3 assistance schools and schools that met their academic index goal are provided below.

	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Category 4
Schools that met their goal 2000:	10	46	41	2
Schools that met their goal 2002:	5	39	48	8
Level 3 assistance schools 2000:	31	51	18	1
Level 3 assistance schools 2002:	30	56	13	0

Guiding Question – At what level did school/district decisions focus on support for teaching and learning, organizational direction and high performance expectations, creating a learning culture and developing leadership capacity?

Effective and successful school leadership provides direction by focusing school vision, actions and resources on the primary purpose of schools – teaching and learning. The findings for this standard indicate the leadership in Level 3 schools is not clearly focused on supporting instruction and learning. In these schools, leadership does not develop and sustain a shared vision (96%)(7.1a), does not make decisions based on student academic performance data (90%)(7.1b) and does not ensure that time is protected and focused on curricular and instructional issues (72%)(7.1f). In these schools, the strongest evidence

**Learning Environment Standard 4 – School Culture.**

*The school/district functions as an effective learning community and supports a climate conducive to performance excellence.*

The percentage of indicators for each category in Standard 4 as determined by 2000 and 2002 audits/reviews of Level 3 assistance schools and schools that met their academic index goal are provided below.

	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Category 4
Schools that met their goal 2000:	5	59	33	3
Schools that met their goal 2002:	2	32	54	13
Level 3 assistance schools 2000:	24	59	17	0
Level 3 assistance schools 2002:	39	55	7	0

Guiding Question – At what level did schools/districts function as effective learning communities and support a climate conducive to performance excellence?

The culture of a school must support a learning community and climate contributing to high expectations of performance for both teaching and learning. Scholastic audit results indicate that schools are attempting to create a school culture that supports an effective learning community. A learning community is defined as an environment that nurtures mutual cooperation and personal growth as members of the community work together to achieve what each cannot accomplish alone. While the successful schools have been successful in creating a safe and orderly school environment (84%), Level 3 assistance schools show little evidence in this area (83% with a rating of 1 or 2) (4.1a). In addition, Level 3 schools show little evidence that high expectations for all students, both academically and behaviorally, is a common belief (4.1c). Ninety six percent of this group showed little evidence (a rating of 1) of teachers holding high achievement expectations for *all* students. Unfortunately, there is also little evidence that all teachers recognize and accept their professional role in student success and failure (4.1e). In general, most Level 3 schools fell short in providing support for the physical, cultural, socio-economic, and intellectual needs of *all* students (4.1k). This may reflect a lack of awareness and commitment to equity and a lack of appreciation for diversity. In successful schools, there is substantial evidence that school leadership promotes and supports the belief that all children can learn at high levels and creates an expectation that teachers and staff will inspire students to their best efforts (4.1b). In these schools, the belief that all students can learn at high levels is joined with appropriate resources to make it happen.

This standard contains the highest number of indicators that have been identified as variance points between schools that have met their academic goal and Level 3 assistance schools.

Commissioner Gene Wilhoit’s Reflection: *“Most schools that meet their academic achievement goals also rank high in creating a safe, orderly environment where equity and diversity are valued and supported and all adults take responsibility for the achievement of all students.”*

*“Teachers’ caring promotes an essential sense of belonging for students whose backgrounds differ from the mainstream.”* Sonia M. Nieto, Educational Leadership, ASCD, May 2003

**Learning Environment Standard 5 – Student, Family, and Community Support.**

*The school/district works with families and community groups to remove barriers to learning in an effort to meet the intellectual, social, career, and developmental needs of students.*

The percentage of indicators for each category in Standard 5 as determined by 2000 and 2002 audits/reviews of Level 3 assistance schools and schools that met their academic index goal are provided below.

	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Category 4
Schools that met their goal 2000:	3	57	36	4
Schools that met their goal 2002:	2	38	50	10
Level 3 assistance schools 2000:	22	60	19	0
Level 3 assistance schools 2002:	23	66	12	0

Guiding Question – At what level did schools/districts work with families and community groups to remove barriers to learning in an effort to meet the intellectual, social, career and developmental needs of students?

Barriers to learning must be addressed and removed and support structures put in place to meet the intellectual, social, career and developmental needs of all students. Scholastic audit results reveal that the majority of audited schools do not have organizational structures and instructional policies and practices in place to reduce barriers to learning (5.1c). In the successful schools, students are provided with a variety of opportunities to receive additional assistance to support their learning beyond initial classroom instruction. In assistance schools, there is little evidence of students being provided opportunities to receive additional assistance to support their learning (5.1d). In most Level 3 schools there is little evidence of structures in place (guidance and counseling, Individual Growth Plans, targeted Extended School Services, etc.) to ensure that all students have access to and an opportunity to be successful in the entire curriculum (5.1b). For example, in all of the audited/reviewed schools, it was determined that not all students have access to the entire curriculum (5.1b). This represents a serious oversight on the part of schools to remove barriers to learning in order to meet the intellectual,

social, career, and developmental needs of all students. Higher performing schools have structures in place to frequently monitor student progress and aggressive intervention supports in place to help students who are falling behind (5.1a).

Schools at all levels demonstrate wide administrative use of computer technology to maintain student records (5.1e).

**Learning Environment Standard 6 – Professional Growth, Development, and Evaluation.**

*The school/district provides research-based, results driven professional development opportunities for staff and implements performance evaluation procedures in order to improve teaching and learning.*

The percentage of indicators for each category in Standard 6 as determined by 2000 and 2002 audits/reviews of Level 3 assistance schools and schools that met their academic index goal are provided below.

	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Category 4
Schools that met their goal 2000:	14	48	37	1
Schools that met their goal 2002:	7	40	49	4
Level 3 assistance schools 2000:	37	44	19	0
Level 3 assistance schools 2002:	38	52	10	0

Guiding Question – At what level did schools/districts provide research-based, results-driven professional development opportunities for staff and implement performance evaluation procedures in order to improve teaching and learning?

The training and evaluation of professional staff and the relationship that exists between professional development, evaluation and Individual Growth Plans and the content knowledge and instructional skills required to teach effectively is critical to the quality of the learning climate in a school. Generally, audited/reviewed schools do not recognize the interrelationship of these strategies and their connection to student performance. Successful schools do so as a matter of common practice. Professional development is not on-going nor job-embedded (6.1e) in any of the audited/reviewed schools, and none of them have an intentional plan for building instructional capacity through on-going professional development (6.1b). Although 41% of the Level 3 assistance schools have a clearly defined certified personnel evaluation process in place (6.2a), 97% of these schools do not view or use evaluation of certified staff as an important and effective tool to improve staff efficiency (6.2c).

Successful schools generally plan professional development programs carefully based on learning goals, student performance and staff needs. These schools are more than 3 times